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The Christmas Burglar

A Play in One Act

BY

MARY H. FLANNER

Author of "BARGAIN DAY."

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THE CHRISTMAS BURGLAR.

CHARACTERS.

PROFESSOR.—*Can be anywhere from fifty years up, absent minded and of benevolent turn of mind. Kindly in speech. Is an old bachelor who has lived alone attended by an only servant.*

DAD.—*A thief from environment and weak will rather than from innate desire to do wrong. Just out of the "pen."*

MEG.—*Dad's girl, taken by the Professor when Dad is sent up. Is about eleven years old: Keen, bright, happy and strangely unspoiled by her life among evil characters. Loves and believes in her Dad.*

SKIN.—*A real crook—unscrupulous and hard as nails. Should be very thin in appearance and have long slim hands.*

TIME:—*Christmas Eve.*



TMP92-009333

The Christmas Burglar.

SCENE.—*The Professor's study. There is a door L. C., leading into Meg's room, another, practical leading out of doors—and a window, practical, in plain sight. A Library table has a small Christmas tree on it and this table must be placed so that it can not be seen by Meg when she "backs" out from her room. A Basket of tree trimmings is placed at one side of the stage where it can be reached conveniently. Chairs, etc., complete the set—with a telephone on a desk at the Right.*

PROF. (*discovered in act of trimming the tree. Stands back and gazes in admiration,—glancing in direction of Meg's door. In the glance he has an idea and stops in the act of placing a bauble on the tree—carried it back to basket and then tiptoes to Meg's door, and calls softly*) Margaret! Margaret!

MEG. (*from within and rather sleepily*) Hoo—Hoo—

PROF. Are you asleep?

MEG. Humph—humph. (yes) I mean Humph—humph—(no) Almost.

PROF. I have a surprise for you.

MEG. (*more awake*) O—oo what is it?

PROF. Come and see.

MEG. Now, I got 'em on. I c'n almost come.

PROF. Take your time, dear, take your time. (*returning to the tree*) The dear child. How she

has improved! Not so much in the matter of speech, but in appearance—I shall never forget the day the Judge and matron brought her here—starved and dying for want of food and love. And now she's plump and rosy—and in six months' time. Wonderful the improvement—wonderful! And I have improved, too—I am not nearly so—so—so absent minded. If I can only keep her with me and make her forget her miserable father. (*stands looking about him*) 'M 'M. What was I about to do? Oh, yes—, to be sure. (*turns to Margaret's door again*) Margaret!

MEG. (*backs in, holding her dress together in the back*) Would you mind buttonin' me up, Proffy.

PROF. (*struggling with the task and getting the buttons crooked*) Where's Sara?

MEG. She's gone to bed with the kids—What's the surprise. (*he prevents her turning just yet*)

PROF. You mean children, Margaret.

MEG. Humph—humph. Don't you know what night this is? Is there a really for-sure surprise?

PROF. (*turns her about*) Look!!

MEG. Gee! Is that the surprise? Where did you swipe it? I mean git—gat it? Say c'n I tech it?

PROF. That is your very own Christmas tree, Margaret.

MEG. O, Lordy—'Scuse me—Say ain't it the whole cheese?

PROF. Cheese? Cheese?

PROF. (*he shakes his head with air of giving it up. She walks around the tree touching it lovingly*) I was about to trim it all alone for you—when suddenly it occurred to me that you perhaps might want to help me—

MEG. Put the shiny things on? That was a bright idee, Proffy—You're a regular Cracker Jack.

PROF. Margaret, my dear, no doubt the term which you have just applied to me is meant to be very complimentary—but in the future I must ask that you refrain from using such an expression. It is not correct. Do you understand?

MEG. You mean you ain't—a Cracker Jack? 'Scuse me.

PROF. (*looks at her a moment and then gets a bauble from basket*) Where would you like to place this?

MEG. Oh, look at it. Ain't it bee-a uu tiful!! (*hangs it on tree*) You got any more? Oh, I wish Dad could see it!

PROF. (*starting towards basket but stopping in his surprise*) Your father!!! Impossible!!

MEG. My Dad hain't in the pen no more. He's out. He was here this morning.

PROF. Out? Out of the penitentiary? This is most extraordinary!! Why, Why! Why! He has not served his time yet!

MEG. My Dad's been a good thief: they let him out sooner. Won't you let him come see my Christmas tree? He hain't—'scuse me isn't never seen a real one—not close to it.

PROF. Margaret, why did you not tell me this sooner?

MEG. I only knowed it this mornin' an' I tried to tell you but you choked me.

PROF. Choked!!

MEG. Wouldn't let me say nuthin'. You know you never let me say nuthin' 'bout Dad since the day you brought me here. O, Proffy you've been good to me. You've made Sara give me all I could eat an' that was a lot at first fer seemed like I was holler clear to my toes—an' then you've learned me all you know an' I'm much obliged, honest I am—but I don't want to UNLEARN my Dad! (*stands looking at the tree*)

PROF. (*after a little wait*) Margaret! (*she*

turns. *He motions her to him and takes her on his lap*) When you came into this lonely house ten months ago, you crept into this lonely old heart as well and I thank the Judge every day for persuading me to take you. I think of you always as the daughter I might have had if my sweetheart had not died. I want to protect you dear—shield you from every ill—watch you grow into a good useful woman. Some day you will understand. Just believe now, that it is best for us not to discuss your father. There! *(puts her down with air of having closed the subject)*

MEG. *(turns to him with almost passionate insistence)* You hain't never even seen my Dad have you?

PROF. *(with gentle remonstrance)* Margaret!

MEG. You hain't, have you?

PROF. No. I have never seen your father.

MEG. An' all you know is what the Jedge told you.

PROF. We'll never get this tree trimmed.

MEG. You didn't never know nuthin' only what the Jedge told you did you? Did you?

PROF. I know the Judge showed your father much clemency from time to time for your sake, dear. But when it came to opening a safe and robbing a store as your father did—that was too serious an offence to be overlooked. The Judge could stretch his clemency no further.

MEG. Your big words goes over my head same as the Jedge's did the day he sent Dad up. But Dad never wanted to crack that safe. Skin Jennings made him do it. Dad's afraid o' Skin. An' Skin can make him do anything. Then course Dad got caught with the goods an' Skin got loose—Dad always gets caught. *(cries)*

PROF. There, there!

(MEG. Dad's been a perfect gent in the pen. Skin

never was a good thief—Skin's a dam dog, Skin is.
(sobs)

PROF. Margaret! I—Come—Come

MEG. Sorry I cussed again, honest, I am—But Skin is a d—— There! I go again. (*puts her head down in her lap for shame. Prof. is at loss how to console her—Looks about and finally gets a doll from basket and slips it under her arms in her lap*)

MEG. (*finally realizes the doll is there and smiles through her tears*) Gee! hain't I the grumpy to be throwin' the weeps when you got me all this? Ain't she a regular Cracker—I ain't goin' to say it!! Look at her cast her peepers at the tree!! Say c'n I show her to Dad? You're goin' to let him come ain't—'scuse me, isn't you. Don't turn him down. When you've been in the pen you'll know how hard it is to git started all over agin. Won't you let him come? Give him a chance!

PROF. (*after a little time to make up his mind*) Yes, he may come to see the Christmas tree.

MEG. (*hugs him*) I knowed you wouldn't turn him down. Look! the doll's smilin' too—'cause she's glad you're goin' to let him come. Maybe you're goin' to let him stay a while—eh?

PROF. We'll see, child, We'll see.

MEG. That means you'll help him. I know. When I ask fer sugar on my bread you always say we'll see—an' then when Sara ain't lookin' you give it to me. (*to doll*) Your grandad's comin' an' we gotta git this tree finished. You sit there an' watch us. (*puts doll in conspicuous place, and runs gaily to basket to get the trimmings. Picks up Jumping Jack and pulls the strings*) Gee git on to the legs of the gent. Looks like you Proffy when you git in a hurry. I'm goin' to put him on the front row. (*puts Jumping Jack on limb of the tree where it can be seen. Then she and the Prof. have bus. ad lib of getting the trimmings—they stop*

to blow horns, exclaim over little surprises—the professor entering into the spirit of it with a boyishness that pleases MEG. This bus. continued to point of placing the star)

PROF. Now dear, you shall hang the star. You remember the story of the Star? The Star of Bethlehem?

MEG. *(takes the star and mounts a chair behind the table to hang it on tree)* Don't you know any other Bible stories Proffy?

PROF. None so appropriate for Christmas eve. Don't you like the story of the Star?

MEG. It's a cute story all right: but Dad could never git wise to no star. Ain't there nothin' in the Bible 'bout a—a burglar?

PROF. Yes, dear. The bible speaks of two burglars—it calls them thieves. And they were hung, Margaret—hung on crosses. And they suffered very, very much, and cried aloud for sympathy and consolation.

MEG. Oh—And didn't no one hear 'em?

PROF. Yes, the Master heard them, and from his own cruel cross he comforted them and said: "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

MEG. What is Paradise?

PROF. Paradise—is—is—a city of peace and happiness.

MEG. And both of the Burglars got to go there.

PROF. There is room for every one in God's city of Peace and happiness.

MEG. *(repeating in awed voice)* "Room for—every—one." *(presses the star lovingly to her cheek and then puts on tree)* That's a jim-dandy story. I like it.

PROF. *(helping her down from chair)* Now you must run back to bed dear.

MEG. Oh, Gee! Ain't there goin' to be no lights on the Santa Claus Bush? ✱

PROF. Lights?

MEG. Yes. Candles.

PROF. Candles? Oh, to be sure, to be sure. (*he starts to basket, followed by Meg, but no candles can be found*)

MEG. (*holding up the candle-holders*) Here's the chanderlierses—but there hain't nothin' to put in 'em.

PROF. (*scratches his head a moment in perplexity*) Then—Get me my hat and coat, Margaret.

MEG. Where you goin'.

PROF. I am going to the store for candles. Who ever heard tell of a Christmas tree without candles? My hat and coat.

MEG. ~~X~~ Oh, Goody—but ain't—isn't——

PROF. Aren't——

MEG. Are-ent you too tired?

PROF. Too tired to go for candles for a little girl's first Christmas tree—when that little girl is YOU? Hurry with my hat and coat.

(MEG exits to return at once with the hat and coat.)

PROF. And now my gloves—(*she gets them from his pocket*) And where did I put my hat? O, on my head, of course. Ah—Let me see have I any change—(*takes out rather large wallet*) Rather more than I shall need—but I will be careful. (*starts*) I'll not be gone long, dear. I wish Sara were here—but you are not afraid?

MEG. No.

PROF. (*he tries the window*) That is locked tight. (*starts*) Ah—be sure you do not open the door for any one until I return.

MEG. I won't.

PROF. Lock the door after me dear—and remember do not open it until I return.—(*disappears*)

MEG. (*locks the door and comes to her doll*) ~~X~~ I never had such a lovely Christmas eve in all my

life. Ain't you glad you dropped into this fambly? Only one thing against 'em. You have to sweep under the bed—and wash behind your ears, it's awful, but it's respectable an' you git used to it. (DAD *taps at window*) Wha's that noise? (to doll) Don't be afraid? I—I—hain't.

DAD. Kid! Kid!

MEG. (*puts doll down and goes to window*) Oh, is it you Dad?

DAD. Yes, open the door. I'm freezin'.

MEG. (*starts and then remembers*) I—I—can't.

DAD. Let me in Kid—

MEG. (*at window*) Wait a minnit—I'll git you somethin' to put around you.

DAD. That'll help a lot—What's the matter with my comin' in? I'm used to gittin' in by windows—(*jumps on in before she can say anything. Puts down but does not lock window. Pause*) Hain't you goin' to ask me to have a chair? Don't seem's pleased to see me as you was this mornin'.

MEG. Dad—You've been drinkin'—I thought you was straight.

DAD. Don't begin that song-and-dance. Gent hain't in, eh?

MEG. How'd you know?

DAD. Been hangin' 'round—saw him heel it fer a car.

MEG. (*alert*) Dad!! Dad! You hain't—spot-tin' this house?

DAD. Cut that out, kid. You know I never done dirt to one that done me a good turn.

MEG. (*relieved*) Then you are on the level. I'm glad—only—

DAD. More objections—eh? Sure sign you're risin' in the world when you can object—

MEG. I was just wishin' you hadn't come in the way you did—

DAD. Maybe I'd better go out an' come in by the door—respectable like? (*starts*)

MEG. No, No! I promised the Proffy I wouldn't unlock the door—an'—I hain't never lied to him, Dad.

DAD. (*somewhat sobered—sits down*) You're a good kid, honey.

MEG. You're good, too, Dad. You told me this mornin' you was on the square. Ain't it so Dad?

DAD. (*trying to evade her questioning*) Here, turn 'round. Guess I'm a little ahead of the gent when it comes to buttonin' you up.

MEG. Dad, they let you out ahead o' time 'cause you was straight in the pen, didn't they?

DAD. It's easier in the pen. Nobody wants to have a jail-bird. Everybody's agin him when he gits out.

MEG. Proffy hain't against you. He's goin' to give you work—maybe.

DAD. Humph! Maybe!

MEG. He is, 'cause he promised me this mornin'—I coaxed him.

DAD. Why didn't you tell me this this mornin'?

MEG. I didn't know it then. Hain't you goin' to take your chance if he gives it to you?

DAD. You coaxed him! I might 'a knowed.

MEG. What d' you mean Dad?

DAD. You coaxed him. Meg, kid—the chaplain told us a story onct 'bout a posey that growed up white an' purty in a pond of dirt an' mud. I reckon that's a true story Kid—'cause you're like that posey. Ef your mother'd lived maybe things'd been different—Maybe—I dunno. You're like her, honey an' she was the right sort—never fer-git that. She was the right sort. You've got the same blue eyes, kid, an' the same straight look in 'em. She would 'a fitted into a palace like this, same's you. (*puts her from him, wearily and gets on his feet*) I must be goin' 'fore the gent gits back.

MEG. Where you goin' Dad?

DAD. (*evasively*) Down town—I guess.

MEG. What you goin' to do, Dad?

DAD. You're askin' lots a questions.

MEG. Dad! You've joined the gang! I know it!!!

DAD. (*trying to be firm*) I hain't goin' to stand no preachin'.

MEG. Skin Jennings's got you on the string!

DAD. (*looking 'round in fear at the name of Skin*) Don't you say nothin' ginst Skin—He's all right.

MEG. Then he's got you Dad. What's he doin' Dad? What's he doin'?

DAD. Sh!! He's workin' the Christmas trees—Good stuff—some of 'em.

MEG. You're not goin' from here tonight.

DAD. Not goin'—Ha—ha—Kid—I got to go.

MEG. Proffy said you might come tomorrow—He won't care if you come a little sooner. I'll splain it all to him.

DAD. That'll do to say—but I know the world kid—an' the professor'll be like all the rest. He won't want a jail-bird—Good night. (*starts*)

MEG. Dad—Did you say Skin's workin' the trees—What—What if he should spot mine. You wouldn't want him to git mine would you Dad?

DAD. (*bridling*) I'd like to see him try it.

MEG. (*pulling him back eagerly*) You hadn't noticed it had you? Look hain't it a beaut?

DAD. (*looking and becoming interested*) An' the gent fixed it all fer you?

MEG. Fer you, too Dad. Hones' he did. An' the doll—Look! Ain't she a cracker—No she ain't—but she's beeaauutiful! Take hold of her—

DAD. (*holding the doll awkwardly*) You never had one like that before—did you kid?

MEG. No.

DAD. Your mother used to fix you dolls to play with—I remember once she dressed up the rollin'

PROF. Yes, yes. Now that you remind me I recall there was another—a thief here—most disagreeable— You've caught him— Well, I congratulate you sir— In the morning, yes—Good night——

MEG. Dad, Dad! You're free!! They've got Skin!!

PROF. (*shakes DAD's hands*) Free, my man!

DAD. Say it again!! Thank God—O Meg Kid—Kid!

MEG. Light the candles, Proffy, quick—(*bells are heard. X-mas Bells*)

CURTAIN.

pin an' you thought it was great. (*hands back the doll. Starts*)

MEG. 'Course I wanted you to see the tree lighted Dad—My very first tree—

DAD. (*turns again to tree*) I hain't seen one lighted since I went to a Sunday school entertainment—when I was a little kid—O, Hell—kid—I must beat it—I can't face the gent.

MEG. You won't have to.

DAD. What d' you mean?

MEG. Listen! You can step in here in my little room—When the tree's all lighted you c'n peek thro' the keyhole—An' then when I come to bed, I'll let you out. An' I'll tell him all about it to-morrow.

DAD. (*giving in at the suggestion*) S'pose he won't rip you up the back?

MEG. He's good—he won't care. Go in my room, Dad.

DAD. (*aside*) Skin'd never think o' lookin' fer me here. (*aloud*) Well, kid—if you think it's all right.

MEG. Sure. Dad—Go in quick. (*professor calls at door—"Margaret"*) Quick—Proffy's at the door. Lay down on the bed and snooze ef you want to—(*shuts the door*) Comin' (*goes to door and admits the professor*) Did you gat—I mean git 'em?

PROF. Get what, Margaret?

MEG. The candles.

PROF. Candles? O, to be sure, to be sure. I did go after candles—I was thinking of an experience I had at the store and almost forgot the candles. (*divesting himself of his hat and coat, etc., and searching for the candles. Finally looks in his hat and gets them*) Here they are! Right where I should not overlook them. As I was saying Margaret, (*they begin to adjust candles during this speech*) As I was saying, I had a very unpleasant experience at the store. Rather sensa-

tion is the better word. Yes. You see, I had bought the candles and had just taken my wallet from my pocket to get the change to pay for them, and as I stood holding the pocketbook in this hand, I was conscious of another hand—long and very slim—
(MEG *who is putting a candle on tree starts*)

MEG. Did you say long and slim—skinny?

PROF. Skinny is a better word perhaps. However as this very—skinny hand reached stealthily towards my wallet—I closed over the money and
(SKIN *appears at window and begins to stealthily lift the sash*) money and cried—"Thief" Thief"
(*at second "Thief" SKIN leaps in at window and stands covering the professor with a gun*)

SKIN. You did, did you?

PROF. You are—are the owner of—the hand. I saw in—the store.

SKIN. De sime. Out wid de wad—I followed it clear here.

MEG. Don't you dare rob this man— Don't you dare. You——

SKIN. Hello, kid— Well dis is luck— And a Christmas tree. I'll look de tree over when I git thro' wid de gent. Out wid de wad, Professor.

PROF. (*beginning to suspect*) How did you know my name—my title of professor?

SKIN. Ask me somethin' hard— Say—I'm tired holdin' this gun.

MEG. Proffy, I——

PROF. One moment, Margaret— Are you this child's father?

SKIN. Double de wad an' I'll pipe you de news!

MEG. It's Skin Jennings Proffy, honest to God it is.

SKIN. You keep your dam mouth shut. I'm her dad, and she's goin' out wid me to-night. I need her on a little job. She knows what I mean.

MEG. Proffy—don't let him take me! Don't!!!

PROF. One word, Margaret—the truth! Did I not leave this window locked?

MEG. Yes,— But——

PROF. And you unlocked it while I was gone?

MEG. Yes, Proffy— Listen!! Listen!! Honest I hain't lied——

PROF. I'll talk to you later. (*to SKIN*) Here is the wallet: It contains all the money I have at present.— Take it and go——

SKIN. This is too easy— De kid comes too! See!

PROF. If you touch that child, I'll brain you with this chair!!!

(*SKIN starts for the child—PROF. makes at him with chair—MEG screams—Dad!! Dad!*)

SKIN. You see she knows who I am! Let her go—let her go!

PROF. (*puts MEG behind him and makes for SKIN—SKIN levels the gun and fires—just in time to catch DAD who awakened by the noise appears at door. DAD totters and falls*)

SKIN. (*looking at DAD*) I winged you—did I? Well I'll see you later. (*makes quick exit through the window*)

MEG. (*bending over DAD*) Dad, dad, are you hurt? Proffy, this is my Dad. I let him in—'cause I wanted to hide him from Skin—and then Skin found him. Dad! Are you hurt?

(*PROF. and MARGARET assist him tenderly to chair and find out extent of injury during conversation. Arm shows where the shot grazed.*)

DAD. It's only a nip—Skin never was good on a straight shot. (*they bandage arm with professor's handkerchief*)

PROF. I'll call the doctor at once. (*PROF. starts*)

DAD. You're all right honey? An' Skin never to 'phone but 'phone rings before he gets there) touched the tree! If he had I'd——

PROF. (*at 'phone*) Well ring off, I wish to—

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How's that? I wish to call a doctor— Yes— Main 189,—Doctor?? I have a man here with an arm that needs a little attention— Slightly only. Yes, please. (*comes back and looks at DAD*) Do you know you create a much more favorable impression on me than—than—the—ahem—the man who left a moment ago.

DAD. I'm sorry I butted in here an' caused you all this trouble. You've been good to her. I'm much obliged. She'll be a credit to you some day.— Good night! (*starts*)

MEG. Dad!! (*looks appealingly at PROF. who nods approval*) Dad! You're goin' to stay!

(DAD turns and shakes his head.)

MEG. (*comes to him*) Yes, you are! Don't you know? I coaxed the proffy to give you work!

(DAD looks at PROF.)

PROF. I want to help you.

DAD. (*joyed at first and then remembering*) No. It's too late. You heard what Skin said. He knows where I am—

PROF. My good man—you're nervous and—

DAD. You don't know Skin! He never let's go. I'm afraid. I'm afraid! (*starts. 'Phone rings again*)

MEG. Wait a minnit. (DAD halts)

PROF. No doubt the doctor. (*at 'phone*) Yes. Yes. Oh, yes, Mr. Officer. Yes, there was a burglar here— Well he's here yet. I say he's here yet.

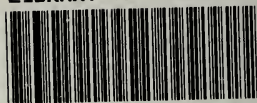
MEG. Oh, Proffy!

DAD. It's all right, Kid! it's safer in the pen.

PROF. How's that? Long slim hands?

MEG. Oh, Dad! That's Skin! Maybe they've got him!

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